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CAROL BLUM

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Preface

The present volume, *Être dix-huitiémiste II*, inspired by Serguei Karp's collection of pieces by distinguished specialists, brings together a number of new reflections on what the Enlightenment and its corollary movements have meant to those of us who have delved into its history, literature, arts and culture. The articles in this collection continue the conversation in perhaps somewhat different ways, offering personal reflection and anecdotal material along with description of scholarly pursuits.

The intense political struggles underlying much of the philosophes' literary endeavours, the sort of Internationale uniting thinkers across national borders, the patterns of social bonding necessitated by the struggles against repression, – all these factors imbue the eighteenth century with a special cohesiveness less conspicuous in other eras. Not unlike the figures we study, we «eighteenth-century people» like to get together around our shared fascination with the period, a tendency less marked among scholars of other eras, whose affinities appear to sort themselves out along other lines.

Some of the accounts in this volume describe a purely intellectual trajectory, while others weave scholarly endeavours together with autobiographical circumstances, allowing us the pleasure of learning something of the voyages embarked upon by our fellow *dix-huitiémistes*.

For my own part, thinking about my colleagues' reflections on their scholarship, teaching and personal journeys of discovery, I was again reminded of what a privilege we have shared in spending our lives reading, teaching and writing about the Age of Enlightenment.

Carol Blum, George Mason University

YVES CITTON

Université de Grenoble, UMR LIRE

From *raison* to *réson* :
three fringe voices of the Enlightenment
(Spinoza, Deschamps, Tarde)

Common voices around the crane

Is it easy to hear voices ? Your average eighteenth-century scholar is likely to frown upon the question. Only religious fanatics and medieval teenage girls « hear voices », and go to war upon their irrational impulses... Since, as everyone knows, a researcher is supposed to identify with his object of study, the average eighteenth-century scholar will of course attempt to understand events by their causes, and explain away voices as acoustic or psychotic phenomena, well within the order of Nature and the grasp of Reason...

Hence a first answer : yes, it is fairly easy to hear the voice of basic commonplaces about what it means to be a *dix-huitiémiste*. Commonplaces, however, appear at various levels. Let us then direct our ears towards a second layer of common notions about « the Age of Enlightenment », no less widespread, but more stimulating than the simple equation : eighteenth century = *Philosophes* = Rationalism. We now hear tales about a double-sided Enlightenment, in which the bright hopes of human perfectibility are undermined by the darker realities of slavery, colonialism, gender bias and proto-capitalist exploitation (if not technological nightmares and mad scientists). We are therefore invited to rediscover « Reason's Other » : thus (re)appear the voice of a crazy dream in a famous geometrician's feverish mind, the voice of a valet deconstructing his master's pretension at being « free », or the voice of an old *bon sauvage* from Tahiti making it quite clear (well ahead of 9/11) that the West deserves no pity – all of these voices coming not from the fringe of the *philosophes'* movement, but from the very man who coordinated their *Encyclopaedia*. Hence a redescription of the « Project of Enlightenment » as a dynamic of radical self-criticism, of restless deterritorialization cleansed of all deceptive hopes of Promised Land : the very nature of human liberty

undermines the individualist premises of bourgeois liberalism, just like a proper understanding of social equality implodes both the Leninist and the Republicanist schemes towards an egalitarian society, or just like mankind's very situation *within* Nature ruins modern hopes of mastery *over* it.

It may not always be *easy* to listen to such voices (and to draw the proper consequences from their disturbing messages), but it entails in no way to renounce the exhilaration of being a *dix-huitiémiste*. If the movement known as the Enlightenment does indeed consist in an endless process of self-uprooting, and if, to adapt an image taken from Daniel Dennett, this process is to be conceived as relying on a *crane* rather than on a «skyhook»¹, then our understanding of the processes which shaped the basic structure of Modernity's crane still plays a crucial role in the ever conflictual drawing of its upper levels.

Among the voices which have paved the way towards this line of flight of endless self-uprooting, I will (arbitrarily) select three writers whose names sketch a probably minoritarian but certainly crucial tradition in the history of this crane-building. Together, and among many others, they define a certain echo chamber which allows us to hear renewed modulations in what was told during the eighteenth century.

From Spinoza...

It was not easy to hear Spinoza's voice (1632-1677) during the eighteenth century. While his *Theologico-political treatise* (1670) made him (in)famous as soon as it came out, his most radical works (the *Ethics* and the *Political treatise*), originally published in the *Opera posthuma*, were not republished until the beginning of the nineteenth century. Indeed, most eighteenth-century writers heard or read of Spinoza through someone else's voice (mostly Bayle, but also Lamy, Boulainviller, etc.). Even if the actual role played by Spinoza's thought within the European Enlightenment remains a debated issue, there is no doubt that it infiltrated the century with a subversive potential that exerted much fascination (appeal or horror) among virtually all intellectual circles². By radically rejecting any form of divine transcendence, by

1. Daniel Dennett, «The Baldwin effect: a crane, not a skyhook», *Evolution and learning: the Baldwin effect reconsidered*, ed. B. Weber & D. Depew, Cambridge, MIT Press, 2002.

2. A remarkable case has recently been made to sustain this view by Jonathan Israel in *The Radical Enlightenment. Philosophy and the making of modernity 1650-1750*, Oxford, OUP, 2001. For a general mapping of Spinoza's presence in the French Enlightenment – a *spectral* presence – see my book *L'Envers de la liberté. L'invention d'un imaginaire spinoziste dans la France des Lumières*, Paris, Editions Amsterdam, 2006.

chasing away all recourses to the Providentialism that pervaded much of Leibnizian and deist thought, by attempting to construct an ethical theory along a geometrical mode of demonstration, and a study of man treating psychological phenomena as mere lines and planes, Spinoza provided an amazingly daring blueprint, which the eighteenth-century builders of Modernity's crane (physiologists for instance) would later fill in with empirical observations and research. In clearing out a proper building site for the crane, however, he turned upside down and threw away not only the rotten carcasses of anthropomorphized divinities, but also the newer rubbish of humanist individualism.

Even if the subtlety and richness of his system is maddeningly complex, his core message can be summed up as a strict insertion of human realities within the boundaries of (what we call) the natural world: man is a part of nature, and as such, he is subjected to all the laws that apply to all other natural objects. This apparently trivial consideration – trivial for us modern, i.e. post-Spinozian thinkers, of course – has at least five important consequences:

1. *Inseparability*. Humans can no more pretend to any mastery over nature than a drop of water can pretend to master the river of which it is a part: if the drop contains a dangerous poison or a powerful taint, it can have dramatic effects on the beings that pass by, but its overall course (and «fate») can only be understood by conceiving it as a part of the river. Hence an inherently «environmentalist» – one could also say «eco-logical» or even «eco-nomical» – approach to the relation between man and nature.

2. *Determinism*. As a consequence, my «fate» is never (wholly) in my hands. I certainly have a will, but this will, as any other phenomenon of the natural world, is never undetermined, never unconditioned. Contrary to what the Christian and Humanist faiths jointly want us to believe, human beings therefore have no free will: they are always (biologically, socially, idiosyncratically) conditioned to will this or that, to climb the path of virtue or to fall into the traps of crime. Spinozist «fatalism», however, does not imply that our «fate» is «all written-out for us up-there» (*écrit là-haut*) since there is no «up-there»: as parts of nature, we hold an infinitesimal (and variable) share of its overall power, and – as Jacques-the-Fatalist fully knows – we are, through everyone of our actions, *co-writers* of the big scroll on which our «fate» is being spelled out.

3. *Intelligence*. It is not a given (absolute) freedom of the will that distinguishes human beings among other natural things, but an acquired (quantitatively variable) capacity to reason, i.e., a capacity to understand events by their causes, which Spinoza calls «intelligence» (*intellectus*, understand-

ing, *entendement*). While nobody can « be free », humans can « become more emancipated » from the immediate conditionings of their environment, by becoming more rational, more intelligent – more active writers of their fate – through a better understanding of the causes that condition their behavior.

4. *Transindividualism*. Intelligence, for Spinoza, is neither God-given nor innate: it is a collective construction. It presupposes historically-built structures of cooperation, assistance and interdependence among human beings. The principle of inseparability applies also fully here: nobody can be a « self-made man » because human intelligence is fundamentally transindividual (as the social nature of language well shows).

5. *Power*. Humans should less be conceived of as being endowed with « rights » than as sites of « power », as *potentials* (for intelligence, for sociability, for creativity) – potentials which circumstances help or prevent from developing. *Virtue*, referring back to its etymology, is less a matter of « duty » than a question of strength and prudence. Instead of being set as a dualist alternative to Force, Rights appear as an inseparable product of Power. Ultimately, rights can be rooted only in the collective powers of human bodies (which include of course the collective powers of human brains): in the sphere of politics, as well as in the production of our general intellect, the power of the multitude (*multitudinis potentia*) plays the leading constitutive role in the development of human history.

In his re-elaboration of Descartes and Hobbes, Spinoza's main relevance for the *dix-huitiémiste* may be to provide us with an alternative to the Kantian approach which has become largely dominant in our circles with the spread of Habermasian views on the (unfinished) « Project of Enlightenment » and on the Public Sphere. In an age where geopolitical analysts like to oppose a Hobbesian America to a Kantian Europe, listening to Spinoza's voice can crucially help us avoid the joint traps of contractualism and of idealism, and therefore it invites us to redefine modernity on a more realistic (but no less inspiring) basis.

... to Tarde

French philosopher Gabriel Tarde (1843-1904), who competed with Durkheim to claim the title of Father of French sociology, is of course rarely mentioned among *dix-huitiémistes*, for the good reason that he wrote a century too late to fit within their temporal scope. When using him as a *point de mire* at the horizon of the project of Enlightenment, however, one sees a number of scattered features of eighteenth-century thought take on a new mean-

ing and prepare, still in the underground, the advent of our modern mass-communication societies. For what Tarde theorizes – with the hindsight of the development of the telegraph, of a mass-media culture (represented at that point by daily newspapers), of the first steps of advertisement and of mass consumption – is a society driven by the circulation of information, a « Republic of Letters » expanded to the scale of the whole multitude, instead of being reduced (as it was the case during the eighteenth century) to a quantitatively minuscule elite.

Equally suspicious towards socialism and free-market liberalism, denouncing the dangers of excessive homogenization in the former as well as the illusions of individual atomism in the second, Tarde produced a very original mix of pessimist utopianism, which provides us with a crucial missing link between the « public sphere » that took its first shape in the salons, cafes and clubs visited by the *philosophes*, and today's (or tomorrow's) Internet society. In repeatedly comparing the functioning of society with the workings of a brain, he offers an alternative to the socio-political model of the philosopher-kings. One should not expect an enlightened elite to lead or educate the blind masses; instead, one should realize that information, knowledge and creativity are produced by *the connexions* between the agents, not by the agents themselves. In other words, « Enlightenment » can only result from the forms of connectedness and resistance at work within the multitudes, not from a Light coming from Above.

Tarde modelizes this complex dynamic of connectedness and resistance through the three intertwined notions of *opposition* (in its exterior forms of struggles, clashes, victories, destructions, as well as in its interior forms of hesitations, contradictions, inconsistencies), *imitation* and *invention* (which together account for both the stability and the transformations of social forms of life). At the beginning, according to Tarde, there is always *the heterogeneous*, a reality made of infinitesimal and originally insignificant differences. The essence of social life, and the constitution of communities, lie not in the exchange of services, as political economy would have us believe, but in the *imitative processes* that set groups of human beings onto culturally specific paths of development. To the sociologist, human institutions are to be seen as the sedimentations left by successive *waves of imitation* that flow through society, as they are structured by the various polarities that transform the originally heterogeneous into relevant oppositions. However, because no imitation ever manages perfectly to reproduce all the features of its model (that is, because any repetition involves some amount of difference, due to the fundamental heterogeneity of reality), these imitative waves always result in producing *variations*. Even if most of these variations

are immediately eliminated through Darwinian mechanisms, the imitative processes provide a constant source of novelty and of *inventions*. Here again going against the grain of political economy, Tarde describes the real source of the wealth and power enjoyed by a society neither in capital nor in labor, but in its *capacity to invent*, which, in order to be maximized, requires a fragile balance of peace and tension, a subtle management the common and of the heterogeneous, a constant modulation between conformism and heterodoxy.

I will only mention four implications of this dynamic, merely to show how it can help us reassess the constitutive axes that drove modernity – largely by rejecting four still prevalent myths that the Rousseau-Romanticism connection has managed to impose upon our worldview.

1. *Originality*. The interplay between imitation and invention that Tarde puts at the core of his thinking leads us to cleanse our vision from the enduring illusions of «originality». Individual singularity *does* play a pivotal role in Tarde's philosophy, but the naive (individualistic, Romantic) argument is turned upside down: singularity is *not an original given* (which society, the State, or the Market, would repress, oppress, etc., and to which one should «return»). It is the *product* of social development, the *result* of imitative processes: I *become original*, less by virtue of what I «originally» had in myself, than by virtue of the unique blend of imitative waves that will have intersected in my person.

2. *Alienation*. Far from being the ultimate evil, alienation – i.e., «becoming-Other», for instance through imitation – appears as a necessary path towards the construction of one's identity. By pushing this principle to its far-reaching consequences, Tarde unfolds the eighteenth-century cosmopolitan ideal to the point of sketching many essential features of what is now driving our accelerating process of «cultural globalization». While ever wider waves of imitation do carry dangers of excessive homogenization, they also carry new potentials for inventive variations. *Communication* (of information, of consuming habits, of dreams and hopes, as well as of fears and viruses) cannot expand without strengthening the *commons* upon which human societies crucially rely. Our *becoming-other* through globalization thus appears as a mere moment of our *becoming-human* – insofar, for example, as our self-definition through national identities (i.e., through imitative waves constrained by national borders) involve(d) such inhumane forms of behavior as wars, xenophobia and expulsion of (economic) refugees.

3. *Conscience*. There is, of course, a price to pay for the acceptance of the dynamic proposed by Tarde. One of its casualties is the traditional anchorage of our identity in the notion of (moral) consciousness and individual

responsibility. «Society is imitation and imitation is a kind of somnambulism»³. Through the image of the somnambulist (a person who is alienated, not herself, not free to choose, not responsible for her actions), Tarde suggests that the process of «Enlightenment» cannot mean for us to «wake up» from the darkness of our superstitious nightmares, in order finally to «face reality»: it more modestly means to «dream lighter dreams», i.e., to be guided by common fantasies less and less nefarious to the development of our common potential.

4. *Substance*. More generally, Tarde leads us to be suspicious towards any reference to an «interior substance» of our individuality, calling us instead to reevaluate everything that takes place on its surface. *Cultivating appearances*, far from being a betrayal of one's self, as Rousseau and the moralists would have us believe, is the best way to elevate it to its full potential. Hence the emphasis put by Tarde on the development of aesthetic life as the field in which our human singularity is called to find its true and highest goal⁴.

Léger-Marie Deschamps

Why should a *dix-huitiémiste* listen to these two voices from the outside of her century? Because together Spinoza and Tarde sketch an arch under which the voices of many eighteenth-century authors resonate with yet unheard echoes. When reassessed within this echo-chamber, the works of writers like Abraham Gaultier, Boulainviller, Meslier, Vauvenargues, Du Marsais, La Mettrie, Helvetius, Diderot, d'Holbach, or Robinet reveal harmonics that prove much richer than suggested by the usual category under which literary history identifies them («materialists»): far from being focused on one single affirmation (the natural against the divine, the body against the soul, the primacy of matter against that of ideas), this tradition

3. He adds: «Imagine a somnambulist who pushes his imitation of his medium to the point of becoming a medium himself, and of magnetising a third party, who, in his turn, will imitate him, and so on. Isn't it what social life is about? This cascade of successive and chained magnetisations is the rule.» (Gabriel Tarde, *Les Lois de l'imitation*, Paris, Les empêcheurs de penser en rond, 2001, chapter «What is a society?», p. 144, 147. Translations mine.)

4. «On can wonder whether the universal similitude, under all its current and future forms, in terms of clothes, alphabet, language, knowledge, law, etc., is the ultimate fruit of civilization, or whether it does not find its reason and final consequence in the blooming of individual differences that would be more true, more intimate, more radical and more delicate than the dissimilitudes that have been destroyed. [...] Thus will bloom the highest flower of social life, the aesthetic life, still a rare and incomplete exception among us [...], this essential and so volatile principle, the profound and fleeing singularity of people, their manner of being, of thinking, of feeling, which is but once and ephemeral.» (*Les Lois de l'imitation*, p. 444-445).

of thinkers has fleshed out *a whole vision* of man-in-society, a whole set of «social imaginary representations» (to borrow from Cornelius Castoriadis's vocabulary), which massively haunts our twenty-first century debates, but which still remains to be studied as such to this day.

Such a reassessment might for instance lead us to revisit and «recenter» writers long considered marginal or eccentric. One such case (among others) is Leger-Marie Deschamps, whose majors writings have been available only in manuscripts (or published in specialized journals) until very recently⁵. After a number of failed attempts to convert the leading *philosophes* to his ontological system – which in Rousseau's eyes brought us back to the vain abstractions of Spinozean metaphysics, and which generated a very strong but ephemeral adhesion only on the part of Diderot – Deschamps virtually fell into oblivion. The apparent confusion of his main conceptual inventions (the distinction between *Le Tout* and *Tout*, which is often equated with *nothing...*), his claim, not only to *tell*, but «to be the truth», his persuasion that a few minutes of effort in reading him would suffice to solve once and for all the enigma of life on which countless generations of thinkers had broken their metaphysical teeth in vain – all of this (understandably) contributed to classify him in the category of the *illuminés* rather than of the *Enlighteners*. And yet, when resituated against the background of the tradition that goes from Spinoza to Tarde, Deschamps' figure as a thinker takes a totally different dimension, to the point of appearing (with that of Diderot) as the most sensitive expression of the most radical changes at stake within Modernity.

His musings around *Tout* and *Le Tout*, mind-boggling as they can be at times, are a valiant attempt to come to terms with the principle of *inseparability* put by Spinoza at the core of his worldview, thus setting the ground for a truly «global» definition of our being. Deschamps pushes this principle to all its *de-individualizing* consequences: in his system, my «identity» is that of a *nexus* in the global (hypercomplex) network of interdependence. His (apparently mad) claim «to be» the truth makes in fact perfect sense: Deschamps theorizes his being as that «part of nature» (embodied in his book) which expresses true statements about the (global) reality of nature. Through his pen, it is therefore nature which expresses itself to nature. The presumptuousness is on his critics' side, who foolishly believe their free-standing individual to be the «original» and unconditioned source of (copyrightable) ideas. Deschamps may sound like a lunatic, but (again like Diderot) he merely draws the ontological consequences of the theories advanced by the physiologists of his time, who started to modelize living

5. See Léger-Marie Deschamps, *Œuvres philosophiques*, Paris, Vrin, 1993, 2 volumes.

beings in general, and human thought in particular, as the self-organizing effects of networks of cells.

By portraying our «identity» as that of an *effect* (or a «mode») rather than as that of a substance, this most radical current of eighteenth-century thought set the ground for a major shift in our social imaginary, a change which, two centuries later, remains to be unfolded in all its consequences (in particular in our conceptualization of economics). Deschamps, who showed his manuscripts to Diderot as the latter was starting to write *D'Alembert's dream*, often returns to the image of the *harpsichord-philosopher*, thus representing human thought along an *acoustic model of vibrating strings* which generate resonating effects in each other, on the basis of harmonic proportions. Since we are in a philosophy based on immanence, such harpsichords are to be conceived not as built by any transcendent instrument-Maker, but as the result of self-organizing processes. And since «thought», just as «life», is presented in this tradition as a qualitative leap within a quantitative continuum, *every* (living) thing is to be conceived along a similar model. Add to this mix the principle of inseparability, and you will be led to imagine the world as one (hypercomplex) self-organizing harpsichord, composed of smaller (and smaller) self-organizing harpsichords in resonating communication with each other. The dynamic and the logic of this self-organization thus rely essentially on relations of harmonic vibrations and resonance, which permeate (and «in-form») all beings thru and thru. In other words, we now find ourselves in a representation of nature which has traded *particles* for *waves*. In the world according to Deschamps, we are but compound wavelengths, intersections of natural and social undulations, consonant or dissonant vibrations.

Resounds and visions

From the earliest sketches of a theory of vibrations by Newton and Huyghens (who was an acquaintance of Spinoza's) to the exploration of the acoustic properties of the vibrating string (on which Diderot wrote a couple of essays, and which played a central role in the hugely popular debates raised in France by Rameau's musical theories), and to the formulation of the classical equation used to give a mathematical account of undulatory phenomena (which to this day is still called «d'Alembert's equation»), the century that span from Spinoza's death to *D'Alembert's dream* witnessed the parallel emergence of a *metaphysical* theory of self-organizing life and of a *physical* theory of vibrations. Links between the two have been as profound and as numerous as (to my knowledge) under-exploited so far by *dix-*

huitiémistes. Representations of the nervous system as a network of vibrating strings competed with the dominant vascular model (where animal spirits flowed through channels) for most of the period; writers like Deschamps, Diderot, or, much more thoroughly and influentially, Hartley, set the ground for a whole worldview using vibrations as the main mode of communication within the human universe – thus preparing the ground for Tarde’s sociology, where imitative waves and common pulsations raised by mass-entertainment play a central role in the constitution of human societies.

As one shifts from a definition of individuality referring to particles to another one referring to waves, one is led to trade the *visual* model underlying so many of our representations of the Enlightenment (*Lumières*, *Verklärung*, *Illuminismo*) for an *acoustic* model. Instead of attempting «to see» the true essence (the idea-*eidós*) of the eighteenth century, this article invites the reader to lend an ear to some of its (fringe) voices. In his disturbing conception of writing, Deschamps provided us with a theory of the echo-chamber which allows us to hear the basso continuo of the post-Spinozist thinking at work throughout the period. Our inner (biological) constitution and our (physico-social) environment «raise us to various tones», as he likes to write: they generate in us a system of (constantly evolving) tensions which leads us *to resonate* with this or that aspect of our milieu – thus redefining the compounded sound of this milieu, by strengthening this dominant chord, or by making that dissonance more easily audible.

Saying that Deschamps merely «repeats» Spinoza, as Rousseau did in their short correspondence, both hits the mark and misses the point: as any form of imitation – and more widely as any form of human behaviour – Deschamps’ work repeats with variations what he has heard; his ontological theory is a *modulation* of the theory of the modes proposed by Spinoza (which itself was a synthetic and inventive repetition-cum-variations where Cartesianism intersected with Hobbes, the Stoic tradition, the Jewish Cabala, the Spanish Baroque and *Libertinage érudit*, among countless others). It is (more than) a happy coincidence for the convergence between Spinozism and the theory of vibrations that the word *modus* chosen by Spinoza to define our (unsubstantial) form of being also refers to «musical modes», i.e., series of sounds united by a form of harmonic solidarity.

In defining our identity in the form of such a mode (rather than as a substantial body, linked or not with a substantial soul), the basso continuo of Spinozism has invited thinkers, throughout the eighteenth century and beyond, to listen to infinitesimal nuances, rather than to look for clear-cut distinctions. In spite of its strong Cartesian tones, it has thus called for a rearticulation of the relations between Sensitivity and Reason: it is in the

margin located between what I hear and what I can demonstrate through rational language that I should search for new truths to be expressed and invented. In spite of its highly abstract nature, it has also called for the development of an aesthetics, in order to give an acceptable account of its constructivist (and ultimately musical) epistemology. By stressing inseparability, and by emphasizing the role of connectivity and communication, it has slowly shifted its accent from grounding principles (which make up most of Spinoza's writings) to the interpretation of points of contact, and interplay between surfaces, to the efficiency of performance and spectacle – i.e., to what Pascal already called *la raison des effets* (the reason of effects).

Is it easy to hear voices? Obviously not, since it took (and it will continue to take) a lot of efforts on the part of Spinozist writers to unfold all the implications of the fact that we *are* the voices we *hear* (and upon which we all compose our singular modulations). A new sensitivity along with a new discipline are required to refine *Raison* with *Réson*, i.e. self-consciously to exploit the resonating properties of our beings in order to improve our reasoning capabilities. For us *dix-huitiémistes*, it means paying close attention to the most subtle and most superficial echoes between past texts, as well as making them resonate with our present concerns – thus *actualizing* the eighteenth century by keeping active the seeds of constant renewal it planted into our societies: *to let oneself be driven by the resonance of one's own voice* may be the most accurate description of the self-uprooting process by which the crane of Modernity is constantly rebuilding our world. It also happens to provide a good definition of the efficiency proper to literature...

Of course, the possible «alienation» inscribed within such a procedure, insofar as it requires a moment of self-abandon, is not without dangers. Minor risks for the *dix-huitiémiste* as a scholar (over-interpretation, retrospective projections); more serious dangers for the *dix-huitiémiste* as a political agent: it may not be easy to hear voices, but it can certainly be quite nefarious to let people act upon them... We may have to accept that the sharpest workings of the human *mens* involve the risk of *dementia*, and sometimes their indiscernability: was Deschamps a «moine fou» or the most sensitive echo chamber of eighteenth-century thought? Are today's neurobiological modelizations of the brain through waves and vibrations, as well as the physicists' (super)string theories, sheer imaginary madness, or the most advanced forms of scientific knowledge? Diderot provides an answer by describing *D'Alembert's dream* as «le plus fou» of all texts.

Réson needs not to be an abdication of Reason, but simply yet another (and sometimes finer) instrument in its service. As Rousseau was well aware throughout his writings, and as Diderot made explicit in his reflections on

aesthetics, perceiving what does not (yet) exist, *seeing what is not (yet) given to view* – in other words: «hearing voices» – is bound to play a crucial role in the process of Enlightenment. The fiction of Emile as well as the ideal beauty imagined by the painter, insofar as they result in an artistic work given to human senses, provide a way for the *virtual* to become *perceivable*, and thus *possible*. In a visual vocabulary, this means that our job as *dix-huitiémistes* consists in describing what the eighteenth century managed to «envision» without yet being able to «see» it; in the vocabulary of musical modes, waves and vibrations, it means investigating the harmonic and melodic potentials of the echoes that haunt the Enlightenment's voices. It may therefore be as important for us to *sing* (unheard tunes) as it is to *see* (the given). The same Spinozist tradition which – from the *Theologico-political treatise* on – was crucially responsible for the «disenchantment of the world» usually associated with Modernity may also invite us today to re-enchant the Enlightenment.

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